

OUTSIDE

They never went out of the house. The man whose name was Harley used to get up first. Sometimes he would take a stroll through the building in his sleeping suit - the temperature remained always mild, day after day. Then he would rouse Calvin, the handsome, broad man who looked as if he could command a dozen talents and never actually used one. He made as much company as Harley needed.

Dapple, the girl with killing grey eyes and black hair, was a light sleeper. The sound of the two men talking would wake her. She would get up and go to rouse May; together they would go down and prepare a meal. While they were doing that, the other two members of the household, Jagger and Pief, would be rousing.

That was how every "day" began: not with the inkling of anything like dawn, but just when the six of them had slept themselves back into wakefulness. They never exerted themselves during the day, but somehow when they climbed back into their beds they slept soundly enough.

The only excitement of the day occurred when they first opened the store. The store was a small room between the kitchen and the blue room. In the far wall was set a wide shelf, and upon this shelf their existence depended. Here, all the supplies "arrived". They would lock the door of the bare room last thing, and when they returned in the morning their needs - food, linen, a new washing machine - would be awaiting them on the shelf. That was just an accepted feature of their existence: they never questioned it among themselves.

On this morning, Dapple and May were ready with the meal before the four men came down. Dapple even had to go to the foot of the wide stairs and call before Pief appeared; so that the opening of the store had to be postponed till after they had eaten, for although the opening had in no way become a ceremony, the women were nervous of going in alone. It was one of those things...

"I hope to get some tobacco," Harley said as he unlocked the door. "I'm nearly out of it."

They walked in and looked at the shelf. It was all but empty.

"No food," observed May, hands on her aproned waist. "We shall be on short rations today."

It was not the first time this had happened. Once - how long ago now? - they kept little track of time - no food had appeared for three days and the shelf had remained empty. They had accepted the shortage placidly.

"We shall eat you before we starve, May," Pief said, and they laughed briefly to acknowledge the joke, although Pief had cracked it last time too. Pief was an unobtrusive little man: not the sort one would notice in a crowd. His small jokes were his most precious possession.

Two packets only lay on the ledge. One was Harley's tobacco, one was a pack of cards. Harley pocketed the one with a grunt and displayed the other, slipping the pack from its wrapping and fanning it towards the others.

"Anyone play?" he asked.

"Poker," Jagger said.

"Canasta."

"Gin rummy."

"We'll play later," Calvin said. "It'll pass the time in the evening." The cards would be a challenge to them; they would have to sit together to play, round a table, facing each other.

Nothing was in operation to separate them, but there seemed no strong force to keep them together, once the tiny business of opening the store was over. Jagger worked the vacuum cleanser down the hall, past the front door that did not open, and rode it up the stairs to clean the upper landings; not that the place was dirty, but cleaning was something you did

anyway in the morning. The women sat with Pief desultorily discussing how to manage the rationing, but after that they lost contact with each other and drifted away on their own. Calvin and Harley had already strolled off in different directions.

The house was a rambling affair. It had few windows, and such as there were did not open, were unbreakable and admitted no light. Darkness lay everywhere; illumination from an invisible source followed one's entry into a room - but the black had to be entered before it faded. Every room was furnished, but with odd pieces that bore little relation to each other, as if there was no purpose for the room. Rooms equipped for purposeless beings have that air about them.

No plan was discernable on first or second floor or in the long empty attics. Only familiarity could reduce the maze-like quality of room and corridor. At least there was ample time for familiarity.

Harley spent a long while walking about, hands in pockets. At one point he met Dapple: she was drooping gracefully over a sketchbook, amateurishly copying a picture that hung on one of the walls - a picture of the room in which she sat. They exchanged a few words, then Harley moved on.

Something lurked in the edge of his mind like a spider in the corner of its web. He stepped into what they called the piano room and then he realized what was worrying him. Almost furtively, he glanced round as the darkness slipped away, and then he looked at the big piano. Some strange things had arrived on the shelf from time to time and had been distributed over the house: one of them stood on the top of the piano now.

It was a model, heavy and about two feet high, squat, almost round, with a sharp nose and four buttressed vanes. Harley knew what it was. It was a ground-to-space ship, a model of the burly ferries that lumbered up to the spaceship proper.

That had caused them more unsettlement than when the piano itself had appeared in the store. Keeping his eyes on the model, Harley seated himself at the piano stool and sat tensely, trying to draw something from the rear of his mind ... something connected with spaceships.

Whatever it was, it was unpleasant, and it dodged backwards whenever he thought he had laid a mental finger on it. So it always eluded him. If only he could discuss it with someone, it might be teased out of its hiding place. Unpleasant: menacing, yet with a promise entangled in the menace.

If he could get at it, meet it boldly face to face, he could do ... something definite. And until he faced it, he could not even say what the something definite was he wanted to do.

A footfall behind him. Without turning, Harley deftly pushed up the piano lid and ran a finger along the keys. Only then did he look back carelessly over his shoulder. Calvin stood there, hands in pockets, looking solid and comfortable.

"Saw the light in here," he said easily. "I thought I'd drop in as I was passing."

"I was thinking I would play the piano awhile," Harley answered with a smile. The thing was not discussable, even with a near acquaintance like Calvin because ... because of the nature of the thing ... because one had to behave like a normal, unworried human being. That at least was sound and clear and gave him comfort: behave like a normal human being.

Reassured, he pulled a gentle tumble of music from the keyboard. He played well. They all played well, Dapple, May, Pief ... as soon as they had assembled the piano, they had all played well. Was that - natural? Harley shot a glance at Calvin. The stocky man leaned against the instrument, back to that disconcerting model, not a care in the world. Nothing showed on his face but an expression of bland amiability. They were all amiable, never quarrelling together.

The six of them gathered for a scanty lunch, their talk was trite and cheerful, and the afternoon followed on the same pattern as the morning, as all the other mornings: secure, comfortable, aimless. Only to Harley did the pattern seem slightly out of focus; he now had a clue to the problem. It was small enough, but in the dead calm of their days it was large enough.

May had dropped the clue. When she helped herself to jelly, Jagger laughingly accused her of taking more than her fair share. Dapple, who always defended May, said: "She's taken less than you, Jagger."

"No," May corrected, "I think I have more than anyone else. I took it for an interior motive."

It was the kind of pun anyone made at times. But Harley carried it away to consider. He paced round one of the silent rooms. Interior, ulterior motives... Did the others here feel the disquiet he felt? Had they a reason for concealing that disquiet? And another question:

Where was "here"?

He shut that one down sharply.

Deal with one thing at a time. Grope your way gently to the abyss. Categorize your knowledge.

One: Earth was getting slightly the worst of a cold war with Nitity.

Two: the Nititians possessed the alarming ability of being able to assume the identical appearance of their enemies.

Three: by this means they could permeate human society.

Four: Earth was unable to view the Nititian civilization from inside.

Inside ... a wave of claustrophobia swept over Harley as he realized that these cardinal facts he knew bore no relation to this little world inside. They came, by what means he did not know, from outside, the vast abstraction that one of them had ever seen. He had a mental picture of a starry void in which men and monsters swam or battled, and then swiftly erased it. Such ideas did not conform with the quiet behaviour of his companions; if they never spoke about outside, did they think about it?

Uneasily, Harley moved about the room; the parquet floor echoed the indecision of his footsteps. He had walked into the billiards room. Now he prodded the balls across the green cloth with one finger, preyed on by conflicting intentions. The white spheres touched and rolled apart. That was how the two halves of his mind worked. Irreconcilables: he should stay here and conform; he should - not stay here (remembering no time when he was not here, Harley could frame the second idea no more clearly than that). Another point of pain was that "here" and "not here" seemed to be not two halves of a homogeneous whole, but two dissonances.

The ivory slid wearily into a pocket. He decided. He would not sleep in his room tonight.

They came from the various parts of the house to share a bedtime drink. By tacit consent the cards had been postponed until some other time: there was, after all, so much other time.

They talked about the slight nothings that comprised their day, the model of one of the rooms that Calvin was building and May furnishing, the faulty light in the upper corridor which came on too slowly. They were subdued. It was time once more to sleep, and in that sleep who knew what dreams might come? But they WOULD sleep. Harley knew - wondering if the others also knew - that with the darkness which descended as they climbed into bed would come an undeniable command to sleep.

He stood tensely just inside his bedroom door, intensely aware of the unorthodoxy of his behaviour. His head hammered painfully and he pressed a cold hand against his temple. He heard the others go one by one to their separate rooms. Pief called good night to him; Harley replied. Silence fell.

Now!

As he stepped nervously into the passage, the light came on. Yes, it

was slow - reluctant. His heart pumped. He was committed. He did not know what he was going to do or what was going to happen, but he was committed. The compulsion to sleep had been avoided. Now he had to hide, and wait.

It is not easy to hide when a light signal follows wherever you go. But by entering a recess which led to a disused room, opening the door slightly and crouching in the doorway, Harley found the faulty landing light dimmed off and left him in the dark.

He was neither happy nor comfortable. His brain seethed in a conflict he hardly understood. He was alarmed to think he had broken the rules and frightened of the creaking darkness about him. But the suspense did not last for long.

The corridor light came back on. Jagger was leaving his bedroom, taking no precaution to be silent. The door swung loudly shut behind him. Harley caught a glimpse of his face before he turned and made for the stairs: he looked noncommittal but serene - like a man going off duty. He went downstairs in bouncy, jaunty fashion.

Jagger should have been in bed asleep. A law of nature had been defied.

Unhesitatingly, Harley followed. He had been prepared for something and something had happened, but his flesh crawled with fright. The light-headed notion came to him that he might disintegrate with fear. All the same, he kept doggedly down the stairs, feet noiseless on the heavy carpet.

Jagger had rounded a corner. He was whistling quietly as he went. Harley heard him unlock a door. That would be the store - no other doors were locked. The whistling faded.

The store was open. No sound came from within. Cautiously, Harley peered inside. The far wall had swung open about a central pivot, revealing a passage beyond. For minutes Harley could not move, staring fixedly at this breach.

Finally, and with a sense of suffocation, he entered the store. Jagger had gone through there. Harley also went through. Somewhere he did not know, somewhere whose existence he had not guessed Somewhere that wasn't the house.... The passage was short and had two doors, one at the end rather like a cage door (Harley did not recognize a lift when he saw one), one in the side, narrow and with a window.

The window was transparent. Harley looked through it and then fell back choking. Dizziness swept in and shook him by the throat.

Stars shone outside.

With an effort, he mastered himself and made his way back upstairs, lurching against the banisters. They had all been living under a ghastly misapprehension....

He barged into Calvin's room and the light lit. A faint, sweet smell was in the air, and Calvin lay on his broad back, fast asleep.

"Calvin! Wake up!" Harley shouted.

The sleeper never moved. Harley was suddenly aware of his own loneliness and the eerie feel of the great house about him. Bending over the bed, he shook Calvin violently by the shoulders and slapped his face.

Calvin groaned and opened one eye.

"Wake up, man," Harley said. "Something terrible's going on here."

The other propped himself on one elbow, communicated fear rousing him thoroughly.

"Jagger's LEFT THE HOUSE," Harley told him. "There's a way outside. We're - we've got to find out what we are." His voice rose to an hysterical pitch. He was shaking Calvin again. "We must find out what's wrong here. Either we are victims of some ghastly experiment - or we're all monsters!"

And as he spoke, before his staring eyes, beneath his clutching hands, Calvin began to wrinkle up and fold and blur, his eyes running

together and his great torso contracting. Something else - something lively and alive - was forming in his place.

Harley only stopped yelling when, having plunged downstairs, the sight of the stars through the small window steadied him. He had to get out, wherever "out" was.

He pulled the small door open and stood in fresh night air.

Harley's eye was not accustomed to judging distances. It took him some while to realize the nature of his surroundings, to realize that mountains stood distantly against the starlit sky, and that he himself stood on a platform twelve feet above the ground. Some distance away, lights gleamed, throwing bright rectangles onto an expanse of tarmac.

There was a steel ladder at the edge of the platform. Biting his lip, Harley approached it and climbed clumsily down. He was shaking violently with cold and fear. When his feet touched solid ground, he began to run. Once he looked back: the house perched on its platform like a frog hunched on top of a rat trap.

He stopped abruptly then, in almost dark. Abhorrence jerked up inside him like retching. The high, crackling stars and the pale serration of the mountains began to spin, and he clenched his fists to hold on to consciousness. That house, whatever it was, was the embodiment of all the coldness in his mind. Harley said to himself: "Whatever has been done to me, I've been cheated. Someone has robbed me of something so thoroughly I don't even know what it is. It's been a cheat, a cheat...." And he choked on the idea of those years that had been pilfered from him. No thought: thought scorched the synapses and ran like acid through the brain. Action only! His leg muscles jerked into movement again.

Buildings loomed about him. He simply ran for the nearest light and burst into the nearest door. Then he pulled up sharp, panting and blinking the harsh illumination out of his pupils.

The walls of the room were covered with graphs and charts. In the centre of the room was a wide desk with vision-screen and loudspeaker on it. It was a business-like room with overloaded ashtrays and a state of ordered untidiness. A thin man sat alertly at the desk; he had a thin mouth.

Four other men stood in the room, all were armed, none seemed surprised to see him. The man at the desk wore a neat suit; the others were in uniform.

Harley leant on the door-jamb and sobbed. He could find no words to say.

"It has taken you four years to get out of there," the thin man said. He had a thin voice.

"Come and look at this," he said, indicating the screen before him. With an effort, Harley complied; his legs worked like rickety crutches.

On the screen, clear and real, was Calvin's bedroom. The outer wall gaped, and through it two uniformed men were dragging a strange creature, a wiry, mechanical-looking being that had once been called Calvin.

"Calvin was a Nititian," Harley observed dully. He was conscious of a sort of stupid surprise at his own observation.

The thin man nodded approvingly.

"Enemy infiltrations constituted quite a threat," he said. "Nowhere on Earth was safe from them: they can kill a man, dispose of him and turn into exact replicas of him. Makes things difficult.... We lost a lot of state secrets that way. But Nititian ships have to land here to disembark the Non-Men and to pick them up again after their work is done. That is the weak link in their chain.

"We intercepted one such ship-load and bagged them singly after they had assumed humanoid form. We subjected them to artificial amnesia and put small groups of them into different environments for study. This is the Army Institute for Investigation of Non-Men, by the way. We've learnt a

lot ... quite enough to combat the menace.... Your group, of course, was one such."

Harley asked in a gritty voice: "Why did you put me in with them?"

The thin man rattled a ruler between his teeth before answering.

"Each group has to have a human observer in their very midst, despite all the scanning devices that watch from outside. You see, a Nititian uses a deal of energy maintaining a human form; once in that shape, he is kept in it by self-hypnosis which only breaks down in times of stress, the amount of stress bearable varying from one individual to another. A human on the spot can sense such stresses.... It's a tiring job for him; we get doubles always to work day on, day off -"

"But I've always been there -"

"Of your group," the thin man cut in, "the human was Jagger, or two men alternating as Jagger. You caught one of them going off duty."

"That doesn't make sense," Harley shouted. "You're trying to say that I -"

He choked on the words. They were no longer pronounceable. He felt his outer form flowing away like sand as from the other side of the desk revolver barrels were levelled at him.

"Your stress level is remarkably high," continued the thin man, turning his gaze away from the spectacle. "But where you fail is where you all fail. Like Earth's insects which imitate vegetables, your cleverness cripples you. You can only be carbon copies. Because Jagger did nothing in the house, all the rest of you instinctively followed suit. You didn't get bored - you didn't even try to make passes at Dapple - as personable a Non-man as I ever saw. Even the model spaceship jerked no appreciable reaction out of you."

Brushing his suit down, he rose before the skeletal being which now cowered in a corner.

"The inhumanity inside will always give you away," he said evenly. "However human you are outside."

Super-Toys Last All Summer Long

by Brian Aldiss

Aldiss, in a January 1997 interview with Wired Magazine, says that in the early 90's he Stanley Kubrick made two collaborative attempts to turn his story "Supertoys..." into a script. "I can't tell you how many directions we went. My favorite was when David and Teddy got exiled to Tin City, a place where the old model robots, like old cars, were living out their days. Stanley definitely had the ambition to make another big science fiction movie, but in the end, we didn't get anywhere. Stanley called in Arthur Clarke and asked him to provide a scenario, but he didn't like that, either....

"I have a feeling, having worked with him, that he hasn't got the dashing confidence of youth," says Aldiss. "But of course, with age, you acquire a different sort of confidence." The director's creative vision, meanwhile, is clearer than ever. "Stanley embraces android technology," Aldiss notes, "and thinks it might eventually take over -- and be an improvement over the human race."

The original drafts made by Aldiss and Kubrick became the starting point for his as-yet unfinished project A.I. Following the departure of Aldiss, Kubrick subsequently worked with authors Ian Watson and Bob Shaw. The film is currently under pre-production in London; few further details are currently known.

"Supertoys..." appeared first in Harper's Bazaar, and is (c)1969 Brian Aldiss, all rights reserved

In Mrs. Swinton's garden, it was always summer. The lovely almond trees stood about it in perpetual leaf. Monica Swinton plucked a saffron-colored rose and showed it to David.

"Isn't it lovely?" she said.

David looked up at her and grinned without replying. Seizing the flower, he ran with it across the lawn and disappeared behind the kennel where the mowerator crouched, ready to cut or sweep or roll when the moment dictated. She stood alone on her impeccable plastic gravel path.

She had tried to love him.

When she made up her mind to follow the boy, she found him in the courtyard floating the rose in his paddling pool. He stood in the pool engrossed, still wearing his sandals.

"David, darling, do you have to be so awful? Come in at once and change your shoes and socks."

He went with her without protest into the house, his dark head bobbing at the level of her waist. At the age of three, he showed no fear of the ultrasonic dryer in the kitchen. But before his

mother could reach for a pair of slippers, he wriggled away and was gone into the silence of the house.

He would probably be looking for Teddy.

Monica Swinton, twenty-nine, of graceful shape and lambent eye, went and sat in her living room, arranging her limbs with taste. She began by sitting and thinking; soon she was just sitting. Time waited on her shoulder with the maniac slowness it reserves for children, the insane, and wives whose husbands are away improving the world. Almost by reflex, she reached out and changed the wavelength of her windows. The garden faded; in its place, the city center rose by her left hand, full of crowding people, blowboats, and buildings (but she kept the sound down). She remained alone. An overcrowded world is the ideal place in which to be lonely.

*

The directors of Synthank were eating an enormous luncheon to celebrate the launching of their new product. Some of them wore the plastic face-masks popular at the time. All were elegantly slender, despite the rich food and drink they were putting away. Their wives were elegantly slender, despite the food and drink they too were putting away. An earlier and less sophisticated generation would have regarded them as beautiful people, apart from their eyes.

Henry Swinton, Managing Director of Synthank, was about to make a speech.

"I'm sorry your wife couldn't be with us to hear you," his neighbor said.

"Monica prefers to stay at home thinking beautiful thoughts," said Swinton, maintaining a smile.

"One would expect such a beautiful woman to have beautiful thoughts," said the neighbor.

Take your mind off my wife, you bastard, thought Swinton, still smiling.

He rose to make his speech amid applause.

After a couple of jokes, he said, "Today marks a real breakthrough for the company. It is now almost ten years since we put our first synthetic life-forms on the world market. You all know what a success they have been, particularly the miniature dinosaurs. But none of them had intelligence.

"It seems like a paradox that in this day and age we can create life but not intelligence. Our first selling line, the Crosswell Tape, sells best of all, and is the most stupid of all." Everyone laughed.

"Though three-quarters of the overcrowded world are starving, we are lucky here to have more than enough, thanks to population control. Obesity's our problem, not malnutrition. I guess there's

nobody round this table who doesn't have a Crosswell working for him in the small intestine, a perfectly safe parasite tape-worm that enables its host to eat up to fifty percent more food and still keep his or her figure. Right?" General nods of agreement.

"Our miniature dinosaurs are almost equally stupid. Today, we launch an intelligent synthetic life-form -- a full-size serving-man.

"Not only does he have intelligence, he has a controlled amount of intelligence. We believe people would be afraid of a being with a human brain. Our serving-man has a small computer in his cranium.

"There have been mechanicals on the market with mini-computers for brains -- plastic things without life, super-toys -- but we have at last found a way to link computer circuitry with synthetic flesh."

*

David sat by the long window of his nursery, wrestling with paper and pencil. Finally, he stopped writing and began to roll the pencil up and down the slope of the desk-lid.

"Teddy!" he said.

Teddy lay on the bed against the wall, under a book with moving pictures and a giant plastic soldier. The speech-pattern of his master's voice activated him and he sat up.

"Teddy, I can't think what to say!"

Climbing off the bed, the bear walked stiffly over to cling to the boy's leg. David lifted him and set him on the desk.

"What have you said so far?"

"I've said --" He picked up his letter and stared hard at it. "I've said, 'Dear Mummy, I hope you're well just now. I love you....'"

There was a long silence, until the bear said, "That sounds fine. Go downstairs and give it to her."

Another long silence.

"It isn't quite right. She won't understand."

Inside the bear, a small computer worked through its program of possibilities. "Why not do it again in crayon?"

When David did not answer, the bear repeated his suggestion. "Why not do it again in crayon?"

David was staring out of the window. "Teddy, you know what I was thinking? How do you tell what are real things from what aren't real things?"

The bear shuffled its alternatives. "Real things are good."

"I wonder if time is good. I don't think Mummy likes time very much. The other day, lots of days ago, she said that time went by her. Is time real, Teddy?"

"Clocks tell the time. Clocks are real. Mummy has clocks so she must like them. She has a clock on her wrist next to her dial."

David started to draw a jumbo jet on the back of his letter. "You and I are real, Teddy, aren't we?"

The bear's eyes regarded the boy unflinchingly. "You and I are real David." It specialized in comfort.

*

Monica walked slowly about the house. It was almost time for the afternoon post to come over the wire. She punched the Post Office number on the dial on her wrist, but nothing came through. A few minutes more.

She could take up her painting. Or she could dial her friends. Or she could wait till Henry came home. Or she could go up and play with David....

She walked out into the hall and to the bottom of the stairs.

"David!"

No answer. She called again and a third time.

"Teddy!" she called, in sharper tones.

"Yes, Mummy!" After a moment's pause, Teddy's head of golden fur appeared at the top of the stairs.

"Is David in his room, Teddy?"

"David went into the garden, Mummy."

"Come down here, Teddy!"

She stood impassively, watching the little furry figure as it climbed down from step to step on its stubby limbs. When it reached the bottom, she picked it up and carried it into the living room. It lay unmoving in her arms, staring up at her. She could feel just the slightest vibration from its motor.

"Stand there, Teddy. I want to talk to you." She set him down on a tabletop, and he stood as she requested, arms set forward and open in the eternal gesture of embrace.

"Teddy, did David tell you to tell me he had gone into the garden?"

The circuits of the bear's brain were too simple for artifice.
"Yes, Mummy."

"So you lied to me."

"Yes. Mummy."

"Stop calling me Mummy! Why is David avoiding me? He's not afraid of me, is he?"

"No. He loves you."

"Why can't we communicate?"

"David's upstairs."

The answer stopped her dead. Why waste time talking to this machine? Why not simply go upstairs and scoop David into her arms and talk to him, as a loving mother should to a loving son? She heard the sheer weight of silence in the house, with a different quality of silence pouring out of every room. On the upper landing, something was moving very silently -- David, trying to hide away from her....

*

He was nearing the end of his speech now. The guests were attentive; so was the Press, lining two walls of the banquetting chamber, recording Henry's words and occasionally photographing him.

"Our serving-man will be, in many senses, a product of the computer. Without computers, we could never have worked through the sophisticated biochemics that go into synthetic flesh. The serving-man will also be an extension of the computer--for he will contain a computer in his own head, a microminiaturized computer capable of dealing with almost any situation he may encounter in the home. With reservations, of course." Laughter at this; many of those present knew the heated debate that had engulfed the Synthank boardroom before the decision had finally been taken to leave the serving-man neuter under his flawless uniform.

"Amid all the triumphs of our civilization -- yes, and amid the crushing problems of overpopulation too -- it is sad to reflect how many millions of people suffer from increasing loneliness and isolation. Our serving-man will be a boon to them: he will always answer, and the most vapid conversation cannot bore him.

"For the future, we plan more models, male and female--some of them without the limitations of this first one, I promise you! -- of more advanced design, true bio-electronic beings.

"Not only will they possess their own computer, capable of individual programming; they will be linked to the World Data Network. Thus everyone will be able to enjoy the equivalent of an Einstein in their own homes. Personal isolation will then be banished forever!"

He sat down to enthusiastic applause. Even the synthetic serving-man, sitting at the table dressed in an unostentatious suit, applauded with gusto.

*

Dragging his satchel, David crept round the side of the house. He climbed on to the ornamental seat under the living-room window and peeped cautiously in.

His mother stood in the middle of the room. Her face was blank, its lack of expression scared him. He watched fascinated. He did not move; she did not move. Time might have stopped, as it had stopped in the garden.

At last she turned and left the room. After waiting a moment, David tapped on the window. Teddy looked round, saw him, tumbled off the table, and came over to the window. Fumbling with his paws, he eventually got it open.

They looked at each other.

"I'm no good, Teddy. Let's run away!"

"You're a very good boy. Your Mummy loves you."

Slowly, he shook his head. "If she loved me, then why can't I talk to her?"

"You're being silly, David. Mummy's lonely. That's why she had you."

"She's got Daddy. I've got nobody 'cept you, and I'm lonely."

Teddy gave him a friendly cuff over the head. "If you feel so bad, you'd better go to the psychiatrist again."

"I hate that old psychiatrist -- he makes me feel I'm not real." He started to run across the lawn. The bear toppled out of the window and followed as fast as its stubby legs would allow.

Monica Swinton was up in the nursery. She called to her son once and then stood there, undecided. All was silent.

Crayons lay on his desk. Obeying a sudden impulse, she went over to the desk and opened it. Dozens of pieces of paper lay inside. Many of them were written in crayon in David's clumsy writing, with each letter picked out in a color different from the letter preceding it. None of the messages was finished.

"My dear Mummy, How are you really, do you love me as much --"

"Dear Mummy, I love you and Daddy and the sun is shining --"

"Dear dear Mummy, Teddy's helping me write to you. I love you and Teddy --"

"Darling Mummy, I'm your one and only son and I love you so much that some times --"

"Dear Mummy, you're really my Mummy and I hate Teddy --"

"Darling Mummy, guess how much I love --"

"Dear Mummy, I'm your little boy not Teddy and I love you but Teddy --"

"Dear Mummy, this is a letter to you just to say how much how ever so much --"

Monica dropped the pieces of paper and burst out crying. In their gay inaccurate colors, the letters fanned out and settled on the floor.

*

Henry Swinton caught the express home in high spirits, and occasionally said a word to the synthetic serving-man he was taking home with him. The serving-man answered politely and punctually, although his answers were not always entirely relevant by human standards.

The Swintons lived in one of the ritziest city-blocks, half a kilometer above the ground. Embedded in other apartments, their apartment had no windows to the outside; nobody wanted to see the overcrowded external world. Henry unlocked the door with his retina pattern-scanner and walked in, followed by the serving-man.

At once, Henry was surrounded by the friendly illusion of gardens set in eternal summer. It was amazing what Whologram could do to create huge mirages in small spaces. Behind its roses and wisteria stood their house; the deception was complete: a Georgian mansion appeared to welcome him.

"How do you like it?" he asked the serving-man.

"Roses occasionally suffer from black spot."

"These roses are guaranteed free from any imperfections."

"It is always advisable to purchase goods with guarantees, even if they cost slightly more."

"Thanks for the information," Henry said dryly. Synthetic lifeforms were less than ten years old, the old android mechanicals less than sixteen; the faults of their systems were still being ironed out, year by year.

He opened the door and called to Monica.

She came out of the sitting-room immediately and flung her arms round him, kissing him ardently on cheek and lips. Henry was amazed.

Pulling back to look at her face, he saw how she seemed to generate light and beauty. It was months since he had seen her so excited. Instinctively, he clasped her tighter.

"Darling, what's happened?"

"Henry, Henry -- oh, my darling, I was in despair ... but I've just dialed the afternoon post and -- you'll never believe it! Oh, it's wonderful!"

"For heaven's sake, woman, what's wonderful?"

He caught a glimpse of the heading on the photostat in her hand, still moist from the wall-receiver: Ministry of Population. He felt the color drain from his face in sudden shock and hope.

"Monica ... oh ... Don't tell me our number's come up!"

"Yes, my darling, yes, we've won this week's parenthood lottery! We can go ahead and conceive a child at once!"

He let out a yell of joy. They danced round the room. Pressure of population was such that reproduction had to be strict, controlled. Childbirth required government permission. For this moment, they had waited four years. Incoherently they cried their delight.

They paused at last, gasping and stood in the middle of the room to laugh at each other's happiness. When she had come down from the nursery, Monica had de-opaused the windows so that they now revealed the vista of garden beyond. Artificial sunlight was growing long and golden across the lawn -- and David and Teddy were staring through the window at them.

Seeing their faces, Henry and his wife grew serious.

"What do we do about them?" Henry asked.

"Teddy's no trouble. He works well."

"Is David malfunctioning?"

"His verbal communication center is still giving trouble. I think he'll have to go back to the factory again."

"Okay. We'll see how he does before the baby's born. Which reminds me--I have a surprise for you: help just when help is needed! Come into the hall and see what I've got."

As the two adults disappeared from the room, boy and bear sat down beneath the standard roses.

"Teddy -- I suppose Mummy and Daddy are real, aren't they?"

Teddy said, "You ask such silly questions, David. Nobody knows what real really means. Let's go indoors."

"First I'm going to have another rose!" Plucking a bright pink flower, he carried it with him into the house. It could lie on the pillow as he went to sleep. Its beauty and softness reminded him of Mummy.

by Brian W. Aldiss

How SOOTHING to the heart it was to be home. I began that evening with nothing but peace in me: and the evening itself jellied down over Africa with a mild mother's touch: so that even now I must refuse myself the luxury of claiming any premonition of the disaster for which the scene was already set. My half-brother, K-Jubal (we had the same father), was in a talkative mood. As we sat at the table on the veranda of his house, his was the major part of the conversation: and this was unusual, for I am a poet, and poets are generally articulate enough.

"... because the new dam is now complete," he was saying, "and I shall take my days more easily. I am going to write my life story, Rog. G-Williams on the World Weekly has been pressing me for it for some time; it'll be serialized, and then turned into audibook form. I should make a lot of money, eh?"

He smiled as he asked this; in my company he always enjoyed playing the heavy materialist. Generally I encouraged him; this time I said: "Jubal, no man in Congo States, no man in the world possibly, has done more for people than you. I am the idle singer of an idle day, but you why, your good works lie about you."

I swept my hand out over the still bright land.

Mokulgu is a rising town on the western fringes of Lake Tanganyika's nothem end. Before Jubal and his engineers came here, it was a sleepy market town, and its natives lived in the indolent fashion of their countless forefathers. In ten years, that ancient pattern was awry; in fifteen, shattered completely. If you lived in Mokulgu now, you slept in a bed in a towering nest of flats, you ate food unfouled by flies, and you moved to the sound of whistles and machinery. You had at your black fingertips, in fact, the benefits of what we persist in calling "Western civilization". If you were more hygienic and healthy so ran the theory you were happier.

But I begin to sound sceptical. That is my error. I happen to have little love for my fellow men; the thought of the Massacre is always with me, even after all this time. I could not deny that the trend of things at Mokulgu and elsewhere, the constant urbanization, was almost unavoidable. But as a man of sensibility, I regretted that human advance should always be over the corpse of Nature.

From where we sat over our southern wines, both lake and town were partially visible, the forests in the immediate area having been demolished long ago. The town was already blazing with light, the lake looked already dark, a thing preparing for night. And to our left, standing out with a clarity which suggested yet more rain to come, stretched the rolling jungles of the Congo tributaries.

For at least three hundred miles in that direction, man had not invaded: there lived the pygmies, flourishing without despoiling. That area, the Congo Source land, would be the next to go; Jubal, indeed, was the spearhead of the attack. But for my generation at least that vast tract of primitive beauty would stand, and I was selfishly glad of it. I always gained more pleasure from trees than population increase statistics.

Jubal caught something of the expression on my face.

"The power we are releasing here will last for ever," he said. "It's already changingimprovingthe entire economy of the area. At last, at long last, Africa is realizing her potentialities."

His voice held almost a tremor, and I thought that this passion for Progress was the secret of his strength.

"You cling too much to the past, Rog," he added.

"Why all this digging and tunnelling and wrenching up of riverbeds?" I asked. "Would not atomics have been a cheaper and easier answer?"

"No," he said decisively. "This system puts to use idle water; once in operation, everything is entirely self-servicing. Besides, uranium is none too plentiful, water is. Venus has no radioactive materials, I believe?"

This sounded to me like an invitation to change the subject. I accepted it.

"They've found none yet," I assented. "But I can speak with no authority. I went purely as a touristand a glorious trip it was."

"It must be wonderful to be so many million miles nearer the sun," he said. It was the sort of plain remark I had often heard him make. On others' lips it might have sounded platitudinous; in his quiet tones I caught a note of sublimity.

"I shall never get to Venus," he said. "There's too much work to be done here. You must have seen some marvels there, Rog!"

"Yes . . . Yet nothing so strange as an elephant."

"And they'll have a breathable atmosphere in a decade, I hear?"

"So they say. They are certainly doing wonders . . . You know, Jubal, I shall have to go back then. You see, there's a feeling, ersomething, a sort of expectancy. No, not quite that; it's hard to explain" I don't converse well. I ramble and mumble when I have something real to say. I could say it to a woman, or I could write it on paper; but Jubal is a man of action, and when I did say it, I deliberately omitted emotional overtones and lost interest in what I said. "It's like courting a woman in armour with the visor closed, on Venus now. You can see it, but you can't touch or smell or breathe it. Always an airtight dome er a space suit between you and actuality. But in ten years' time, you'll be able to run your bare fingers through the sand, feel the breezes on your cheek... Well, you know what I mean, er sort of feel her undressed."

He was thinkingI saw it in his eyes"Rog's going to go all poetic on me." He said: "And you approve of that-the change-over of atmospheres?"

"Yes."

"Yet you don't approve of what we're doing here, which is just the same sort of thing?"

He had a point. "You're upsetting a delicate balance here," I said gingerly. "A thousand ecological factors are swept by the board just so that you can grind these waters through your turbines. And the same thing's happened at Owen Falls over on Lake Victoria... But on Venus there's no such balance. It's just a clean page waiting for man to write what he will on it. Under that CO blanket, there's been no spark of life: the mountains are bare of moss, the valleys lie innocent of grass; in the geological strata, no fossils sleep;

no arncebae move in the sea. But what you're doing here. . ."
"People!" he exclaimed. "I've got people to consider. Babies need to be born, mouths must be fed. A man must live. Your sort of feelings are all very wellthey make good poemsbut I consider the people. I love the people. For them I work. . ."

He waved his hands, overcome by his own grandiose visions. If the passion for Progress was his strength, the fallacy inherent in the idea was his secret weakness. I began to grow warm.

"You get good conditions for these people, they procreate forthwith. Next generation, another benefactor will have to step forward and get good conditions for the children. That's Progress, eh?" I asked maliciously.

"I see you so rarely, Rog; don't let's quarrel," he said meekly. "I just do what I can. I'm only an engineer."

That was how he always won an altercation. Before meekness I have no defence. But hostility ran like a sewer below the level of our conversation.

The sun had finished another day. With the sudden darkness came chill. Jubal pressed a button, and glass slid round the veranda, enclosing us. Like Venus, I thought; but here you could still smell that spicy, bosomy scent which is the breath of dear Africa herself. On Venus, the smells are imported.

We poured some more wine and talked of family matters.

In a short while his wife, Sloe, joined us. I began to feel at home. The feeling was only partly psychological; my glands were now beginning to readjust fully to normal conditions after their long days in space travel.

J-Casta also appeared. Him I was less pleased to see.

He was the boss type, the strong-arm man: as Jubal's underling, he pandered wretchedly to him and bullied everyone else on the project. He (and there were many others like him, unfortunately) thought of the Massacre as man's greatest achievement. This evening, in the presence of his superiors, after a preliminary burst of showing off, he was quiet enough. When they pressed me to, I talked of Venus. As I spoke, back rushed that humblingbut intoxicatingsense of awe to think I had actually lived to stand in full possession of my many faculties on that startling planet. The same feeling had often possessed me on Mars. And (as justifiably) on Earth. The vision chimed, and an amber light blinked drowsily off and on in Jubal's tank. Even then, no premonition of catastrophe; since then, I can never see that amber heartbeat without anxiety.

Jubal answered it, and a man's face swam up in the tank to greet him. They talked; I could catch no words, but the sudden tension was apparent. Sloe went over and put her arm round Jubal's shoulder.

"Something up," J-Casta commented.

"Yes," I said.

"That's Chief M-Shawn on the visionfrom Owenstown, over on Lake Victoria."

Then Jubal flashed off and came slowly back to where we were sitting.

"That was M-Shawn," he said. "The level of Lake Victoria has just dropped three inches." He lit a cheroot with clumsy fingers, his eyes staring in mystification far beyond the flame.

"Dam okay, boss?" J-Casta asked.

"Perfectly. They're going to phone us if they find anything ..."

"Has this happened before?" I asked, not quite able to understand their worried looks.

"Of course not," my half-brother said scornfully. "Surely you must see the implications of it? Something highly unprecedented has occurred."

"But surely a mere three inches of water. . ."

At that he laughed briefly. Even J-Casta permitted himself a snort.

"Lake Victoria is an inland sea," Jubal said grimly. "It's as big as Tasmania. Three inches all over that area means many thousands of tons of water. Casta, I think we'll get down to Mokulgu; it won't do any harm to alert the first aid services, just in case they're needed. Got your tracer?"

"Yes, boss. I'm coming."

Jubal patted Sloe's arm, nodded to me and left without relaxing his worried look. He and J-Casta shortly appeared outside. They bundled into a float, soared dangerously close to a giant walnut tree and vanished into the night.

Nervously, Sloe put down her cheroot and did not resume it. She fingered a dial and the windows opaqued.

"There's an ominous waiting quality out there I don't like," she said, to explain our sudden privacy.

"Should I be feeling alarmed?" I asked.

She flashed me a smile. "Quite honestly, yes. You don't live in our world, Rog, or you would guess at once what was happening at Lake Victoria. They've just finished raising the level again; for a long time they've been on about more pressure, and the recent heavy rains gave them their chance to build it up. It seems to have been the last straw."

"And what does this three-inch drop mean? Is there a breach in the dam somewhere?"

"No. They'd have found that. I'm afraid it means the bed of the lake has collapsed somewhere. The water's pouring into subterranean reservoirs."

The extreme seriousness of the matter was now obvious even to me. Lake Victoria is the source of the White Nile; if it ceased to feed the river, millions of people in Uganda and the Sudan would die of drought. And not only people: birds, beasts, fish, insects, plants.

We both grew restless. We took a turn outside in the cool night air, and then decided we too would go down to the town.

All the way there a picture filled my head; the image of that great dark lake emptying like a wash-basin. Did it drain in sinister silence, or did it gargle as it went? Men of action forget to tell you vital details like that.

That night was an anticlimax, apart from the sight of the full moon sailing over Mount Kangosi. We joined Jubal and his henchman and hung about uneasily until midnight.

As if an unknown god had been propitiated by the sacrifice of an hour's sleep, we then felt easier and retired to bed.

The news was bad the next morning. By the time

I was dressed Jubal was already back in town; Sloe and I breakfasted alone together. She told me they had been informed that Victoria had now dropped thirteen and a half inches; the rate of fall seemed to be increasing.

I flew into Mokulgu and found Jubal without difficulty. He was just embarking on one of the Dam Authority's survey floats with J-Casta.

"You'd better come, too, Rog," he shouted. "You'll probably enjoy the flight more than we shall."

I did enjoy the flight, despite the circumstances. A disturbance on Lake Tanganyika's eastern fringes had been observed on an earlier survey and we were going to investigate it.

"You're not afraid the bed will collapse here, too, are you?" I asked.

"It's not that," Jubal said. "The two hundred miles between us and Victoria is a faulty region, geologically speaking. I'll show you a map of the strata when we get back. It's more than likely that all that runaway subterranean water may be heading in our direction; that's what I'm afraid of. The possibility has been known for a long while."

"And no precautions taken?"

"What could we do but cross our fingers? The possibility exists that the Moon will spiral to Earth, but we don't all live in shelters because of it."

"Justifying yourself, Jubal?"

"Possibly," he replied, looking away. Again that stupid antagonism.

We flew through a heavy rain shower, which dappled the grey surface of the lake. Then we were over the reported disturbance. A dull brown stain, a blot on a bright new garment, spread over the water, from the steep eastern shore to about half a mile out.

"Put us down, pilot," Jubal ordered.

We sank, and kissed the lake. Several hundred yards away rose the base of Mount Kangosi. I looked with admiration up the slope; great slabs of rock stood out from the verdure; crouching at the bottom of this colossus was a village, part of it forced by the steepness of the incline to stand out on piles into the lake.

"Leave everything to me, boss," J-Casta said, grabbing a hand asdic from the port locker and climbing out on to the float. We followed. It seemed likely that the disturbance was due to a slight subsidence in the side of the lake basin. Such subsidences, Jubal said, were not uncommon, but in this case it might provide a link with Lake Victoria. If they could pinpoint the position of the new fault, frogmen would be sent down to investigate.

"We're going to have company," Jubal remarked to me, waving a hand over the water.

A dozen or so dugouts lay between us and the shore. Each bore two or three shining-skinned fishermen. The two canoes nearest us had swung round and were now being paddled towards our float.

I watched them with more interest than I gave to the asdic sweep. Men like these sturdy fishermen had existed here for countless generations, unchanged: before white men had known of them, before Rome's legions had destroyed the vineyards of Carthage, before who knows if not before the heady uprush of civilization elsewhere? such men had fished quietly in this great lake. They seemed not to have advanced at all, so rapidly does the world move; but perhaps when all other races have fallen away, burnt out and exhausted, these steady villagers will come into a kingdom of their own. I would elect

to live in that realm.

A man in the leading canoe stood up, raising his hand in greeting. I replied, glancing over his shoulder at the curtain of green behind him. Something caught my eye.

Above some yards of bare rock, a hundred feet up the slope of the mountain, two magnificent Mvules African teak trees grew. A china-blue bird dipped suddenly from one of the trees and sped far and fast away over the water, fighting to outpace its reflection. And the tree itself began to cant slowly from the vertical into a horizontal position. Jubal had binoculars round his neck. My curiosity aroused, I reached to borrow them. Even as I did so, I saw a spring of water start from the base of the Mvules. A rock was dislodged. I saw it hurtle down into the bush below, starting in turn a trail of earth and stones which fell down almost on to the thatched roofs of the village. The spring began to spurt more freely now. It gleamed in the sun: it looked beautiful but I was alarmed.

"Look!" I pointed.

Both Jubal and the fisherman followed the line of my outstretched arm. J-Casta continued to bend over his metal box. Even as I pointed, the cliff shuddered. The other Mvule went down. Like an envelope being torn, the rock split horizontally and a tongue of water burst from it. The split widened, the water became a wall, pouring out and down.

The sound of the splitting came clear and hard to our startled ears. Then came the roar of the water, bursting down the hillside. It washed everything before it. I saw trees, bushes and boulders hurried down in it. I saw the original fissure lengthen and lengthen like a cruel smile, cutting through the ground as fast as fire. Other cracks started, running uphill and across: every one of them began to spout water.

The fishermen stood up, shouting as their homes were swept away by the first fury of the flood.

And then the entire lower mountainside began to slip. With a cumulative roar, mud, water and rock rolled down into the lake. Where they had been, a solid torrent cascaded out, one mighty wall of angry water. The escaping 'flow from Lake Victoria had found its outlet!

Next moment, our calm surface was a furious sea. Jubal slipped and fell on to one knee. I grabbed him, and almost went overboard myself. A series of giant waves plunged outwards from the shore. "The first one rocked us, the second one overturned our flimsy craft completely.

I came to the surface coughing and snorting. J-Casta rose at my side. We were just in time to see the float slip completely under; it sank in no time, carrying the pilot with it. I had not even seen his face, poor fellow.

Jubal came up by the fisherman, who had also overturned. But dugouts do not sink. We owed our lives to those hollowed tree trunks. They were righted, and Jubal and his henchman climbed into one, while I climbed into the other. The waves were still fierce, but had attained a sort of regularity which allowed us to cope with them.

The breakthrough was now a quarter of a mile long. Water poured from it with unabated force, a mighty waterfall where land had been before. We skirted it painfully, making a landing as near to it as we dared.

The rest of that day, under its blinding arch of sky, passed

in various stages of confusion and fear.

It was two and a half hours before we were taken off the strip of shore. We were not idle in that time, although every few minutes Jubal paused to curse the fact that he was stranded and powerless. Miraculous as it seems, there were some survivors from the obliterated village, women mostly; we helped to get them ashore and built fires for them.

Meanwhile, Dam Authority planes began to circle the area. We managed to attract the attention of one, which landed by our party. Jubal's manner changed at once; now that he had a machine and men who, unlike the villagers, were in his command, he worked with a silent purpose allowing of no question.

Over the vision, he ordered the rest of the floats to attend to the villagers' needs. We sped back to Mokulgu.

On the way, Jubal spoke to Owenstown. They took his news almost without comment. They reported that Victoria was still sinking, although the rate had now steadied. A twenty-four-hour a day airlift was about to go into operation, dropping solid blocks of marble on to the lake bed. "There, a fault about three miles square had been located; four frogmen had been lost, drowned.

"It's like tossing pennies into the ocean," Jubal said.

I was thinking of the frogmen, sucked irresistibly down the fault. They would be swept through underground waterways, battered and pulped, to be spat out eventually into our lake.

Vision from Mokulgu, coming on just before we landed there, reported a breach in the lake banks, some twenty miles north of the town. At a word from Jubal, we switched plans and veered north at once to see just how extensive the damage was.

The break was at a tiny cluster of huts, dignified by the name of Ulatuama, growing like a wart on the edge of Lake Tanganyika. Several men, the crew of a Dam Authority patrol boat, were working furiously at a widening gap. The damage had been caused by the very waves which had swamped us, and I learnt that a small, disused lock had stood here, relic of an earlier irrigation scheme; so the weakness had been of man's making. Beyond the lock had been a dried-up channel some twenty yards wide; this was now a swollen, plunging river.

"Is this serious?" I asked Jubal. "Isn't there a good way of getting rid of surplus water?"

He gave me a withering look. "Where are we if we lose control?" he demanded. "If this thing here runs away with us, the combined waters of Victoria and Tanganyika will flood down into the Congo."

Even as he spoke, the bank to the south of the escaping waters crumbled; several yards were swept away, their places instantly taken by the current.

We flew back to Mokulgu. Jubal visioned the mayor and got permission to broadcast to the city. I did not hear him speak; reaction had set in, and I had to go and sit quietly at home with Sloe fussing daintily round me. Although you "know" from a child that Earth is a planet, it is only when you drift towards it from space, seeing it hang round and finite ahead, that you can realize the fact. And so, although I had always "known" man was puny, it was the sight of that vast collapsing slab of mountain which had driven the fact into my

marrow.

To guess the sort of sentiments Jubal broadcast to the city was easy. He would talk of "rallying round in this our time of crisis". He would speak of the need for "all hands uniting against our ancient enemy, Nature". He would come over big on the tanks; he would be big, his fists clenched, his eyes ablaze. He was in touch with the people. And they would do what he said, for Jubal carried conviction. Perhaps I envied my half-brother.

Labour and supplies began to pour north to mend the damaged bank. Jubal, meanwhile, thought up a typically flamboyant scheme. Tilly, one of the lake steamers, was pressed into service and loaded full of rock and clay by steam shovel. With Jubal standing on the bridge, it was manoeuvred into the centre of the danger area and scuttled. Half in and half out of the rushing water, it now formed a base from which a new dam could be built to stem the flood. Watched by a cheering crowd, Jubal and crew skimmed to safety in a motor boat.

"We shall conquer if we have to dam the water with our bodies," he cried. A thousand cheering throats told him how much they liked this idea.

The pitch of crisis which had then been engendered was maintained all through the next two days. For most of that time it rained, and men fought to erect their barrier on clinging mud. Jubal's popularity and consequently his influence underwent a rapid diminution. The reason for this was two-fold. He quarrelled with J-Casta, whose suggestion to throw open the new dam to relieve pressure elsewhere was refused, and he ran into stiff opposition from Mokulgu Town Council.

This august body, composed of the avariciously successful and the successfully avaricious, was annoyed about Tilly. Tilly belonged to the local government, and Jubal had, in effect, stolen it. The men from the factories who had downed tools to fight the water were summoned back to work; the Dam Authority must tend its own affairs.

Jubal merely sneered at this dangerous pique and visioned Leopoldville. In the briefest possible time, he had the army helping him.

It was at dawn on the morning of the third day that he visioned me to go down and see him. I said adieu to Sloe and took a float over to Ulatuama.

Jubal stood alone by the water's edge. The sun was still swathed in mist, and he looked cold and pinched. Behind him, dimly outlined figures moved to and fro, like allegorical figures on a frieze. He surveyed me curiously before speaking.

"The work's nearly done, Rog," he said. He looked as if he needed sleep, but he added energetically, pointing across the lake: "Then we tackle the main job of plugging that waterfall."

I looked across the silent lake. The far shore was invisible, but out of the layers of mist rose Mount Kangosi. Even at this distance, in the early morning hush, came the faint roar of the new waterfall. And there was another sound, intermittent but persistent: beyond the mountain, they were bombing fault lines. That way they hoped to cause a collapse which would plug Victoria's escape routes. So far, they had had no success, but the bombing went on, making a battlefield of what had once been glorious country.

"Sorry I haven't seen anything of you and Sloe," Jubal said. "suppose?"

"You've been busy. Sloe called you on the vision."

"Oh that. Come on into my hut, Rog."

We walked over to a temporary structure; the grass was overloaded with dew. In Jubal's hut, J-Casta was dressing, smoking a cheroot as he dexterously pulled on a shirt. He gave me a surly greeting, whose antagonism I sensed was directed through me at Jubal.

As soon as the latter closed the door, he said: "Rog, promise me something."

"Tell me what."

"If anything happens to me, I want you to marry Sloe. She's your sort."

Concealing my irritation, I said: "That's hardly a reasonable request."

"You and she get on well together, don't you?"

"Certainly. But you see my outlook on life is. . . well, for one thing I like to stay detached. An observer, you know, observing. I just want to sample the landscapes and the food and the women of the solar system. I don't want to marry, just move on at the right time. Sloe's very nice but"

My ghastly inability to express the pressure of inner feeling was upon me. In women I like flamboyance, wit, and a high spirit, but I tire quickly of them and then have to seek their manifestation elsewhere. Besides, Sloe frankly had had her sensibilities blunted from living with Jubal. He now chose to misunderstand my hesitations.

"Are you standing there trying to tell me that you've already tired of whatever you've been doing behind my back?"

he demanded. "Youyou" He called me a dirty name;

I forgot to make allowances for the strain he had been undergoing, and lost my temper.

"Oh, calm down," I snapped. "You're overtired and overwrought, and probably over-sexed too. I've not touched your little woman¹ like to drink from pure streams. So you can put the entire notion out of your head."

Trouble came to us as suddenly as it had done to the lake, although nobody afterwards could have said there had been no warning.

He rushed at me with his shoulders hunched and fists swinging. It was an embarrassing moment. I am against violence, and believe in the power of words, but I did the only possible thing: spring to one side and catch him a heavy blow over the heart.

Poor Jubal! No doubt, in his frustration against the forces of nature, he was using me only as a safety valve. But with shame, I will now confess what savage pleasure that blow gave me; I was filled with lust to strike him again. I can perceive dimly how atrocities such as the Massacre came about. As Jubal turned on me, I flung myself at him, breaking down his defences, piling blows into his chest. It was, I suppose, a form of self-expression.

J-Casta stopped it, breaking in between us and thrusting his ugly face into mine, his hand like a clamp round my wrist.

"Pack it up," he said. "I'd gladly do the job myself, but this is not the time."

As he spoke, the hut trembled. We were hard pressed to keep our feet, staggering together like drunken men.

"Now what" Jubal said, and flung open the door. I caught a rectangular view of trees and mist, men running, and the emergency dam sailing away on a smooth black slide of escaping water. The banks were collapsing! Glimpsing the scene, Jubal instantly attempted to slam the door shut again. The wave struck us, battering the cabin off its flimsy foundations. Jubal cried sharply as he was tossed against a wall. Next moment we were floundering in a hell of flying furniture and water.

Swept along on a giant sluice, the cabin turned over and over like a dice. That I was preserved was the merest accident. Through a maze of foam, I saw a heavy bunk crashing towards me, and managed to flounder aside in time. It missed me by a finger's width and broke through the boarding wall. I was swept helplessly after it.

When I surfaced, the cabin was out of sight and I was being borne along at a great rate; and the ugly scene in the cabin was something fruitless that happened a million years ago. Nearly wrenching my arm off in the process, I seized a tree which was still standing, and clung on. Once I had recovered my breath, I was able to climb out of the water entirely, wedge myself between two branches and regain my breath. The scene was one of awesome desolation. I had what in less calamitous circumstances might have been called "a good view" of it all.

A lake spread all round me, its surface moving smartly and with apparent purpose. Its forward line, already far away, was marked by a high yellow cascade. In its wake stretched a miscellany of objects, of which only the trees stood out clearly. Most of the trees were eucalyptus: this area had probably been reclaimed marsh.

To the north, the old shore-line of the lake still stood. The ground was higher there and solid rock jutted stolidly into the flood. To the south, the shore-line was being joyously chewed away. Mokulgu had about half an hour left before it was swamped and obliterated. I wondered how the Mokulgu Town Council were coping with the situation.

Overhead, the sun now was shining clear, bars of pink, wispy cloud flecked the blue sky. The pink and the blue were of the exact vulgar tints found in two-colour prints of the early twentieth century A.D. that is, a hundred years before the Massacre. I was almost happy to see this lack of taste in the sky matching the lack of stability elsewhere. I was almost happy: but I was weeping.

"They visioned me that one of the floats had picked you up and not Jubal. Is there any hope for him, Rog, or is that a foolish question?"

"I can't give you a sensible answer. He was a strong swimmer, don't forget. They may find him yet."

I spoke to Sloe over the heads of a crowd of people. Mokulgu, surely enough, had been washed away. The survivors, homeless and bereaved, crowded on to high ground. Sloe had generously thrown open most of her house as a sort of rest-camp-cum-soup-kitchen. She superintended everything with a cool authority which suitably concealed her personal feelings. For that I was grateful: Sloe's feelings must be no affair of mine.

She smiled at me before turning to address someone behind her. Already the light was taking on the intensity of early

evening. Above the babble of voices round me came the deep song of speeding water. It would continue for months yet: Africa was ruptured at her very heart, beyond man's mending.

Instead of flowing northward, fertilizing its old valley, Victoria crashed into our lake, adding its burden to the weight of water rolling west. While twenty-one million people perished of drought in Egypt, as many perished of flood and typhoid in the Congo.

I seemed to know what was coming as I stood in the crowded room, knowing Jubal dead, knowing the nation of Africa to be bleeding to death. We were dying of our own wounds.

The ten years to follow would be as terrible as the ten years of the Massacre, when every member of the white race had been slain.

Now we Negroes, in our turn, stood at the bar of history.